

THE CRITIC.

BY GEOFFREY JUVENAL, ESQ.

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“In quo hoc maximum est quod neque ante illum quem ille imitaretur, neque post illum, qui eum imitari posset, inventus est.”

I HAVE been requested by the executor of a late modern philosopher, to publish certain productions of his testator; which I do the more readily, because they exhibit in a striking manner, the chief characteristics and excellencies of the professors of philosophy of the present day. I hope to include the letters in two papers, which I shall devote to them.

TO WILLIAM WIRT,

The interesting Ornament of the Slave States.

SIR,

The state, of which you are a citizen, had long exercised the right of supplying our

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country with Presidents and Mulattoes. It was reserved for you to assert her *literary* supremacy. You have done so; and the astonished world will, doubtless, pay its homage to the majesty of your genius, as soon as it shall have recovered from the first shock of your eloquence. As a "Spy," and as a "Sketcher," you are above all praise: and if, in the character of a "Batchelor," your style be somewhat less chaste, it is owing, perhaps, (like the suicide of your slaves) to "an inherent vice of the article."* If there be a defect in your writings, it is the diffidence which pervades them. Permit me to observe, sir, that, in speaking of such men as you have spoken of, modesty is, indeed, an unseasonable virtue.

With these sentiments of almost adoration, I presume to dedicate to you the following letters.

Believe me,
With unfeigned sincerity,
Your humble servant,
A. R. executor, &c.

* Valin, p. 55.

LETTER I.

TO A——R——, Esq.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

In those unreserved conversations, in which we have used to dispute "*de quolibet ente*" in a spirit of mutual and entire confidence, we have often lamented the hardship of particular instances of persecution, arising from a feeling of envy towards their objects. You may remember that, at our last meeting, you went so far as almost to arraign the justice of Providence in this respect. I then tried to convince you of the fallacy of that opinion. I argued, that the prevalence of envy, no more than that of any other sin, could be ascribed to Providence, as a fault. That the seeds of all the vices were indeed implanted in us, but that the seeds of the virtues were equally so; and that reason was given us besides, as a kind of mental horticulturist, to cherish the good plants, and to check the growth of the weeds. That we were thus secured from evil, quite as far as was compatible with free-will; and, that we could not with justice complain, that we were not irresistibly bound to virtue. This was, at the time, my real opinion: I have since then altered it somewhat, and I now write to inform you of the change. I no longer think

that envy is to be considered on the same footing with the other vices. They, indeed, are the "urenda filix" which the poet speaks of. But envy is both implanted and cherished by nature, for very useful purposes. These, I am now to declare to you. My theory is new; it has never before been broached; if it be correct, the knowledge of it will be very practically important to you, in your worldly pilgrimage, and I, therefore, entreat your favourable attention.

I hold then—that envy is to nature what leaven is to a baker. We see that the latter is obliged to raise his bread with bitter and frothy yeast: and so nature (being bound by original compact—as the philosophers tell us—to make all men equal at first) is forced to raise her favoured children by the aid and operation of that venomous juice—envy.

Yes, my dear —, it is the order of nature, that whenever an original *genio*, "cui mens diviniior"—lies in of a new invention—literary—mechanical—mathematical—or of whatsoever sort it may be—there is always a kennel of cynics—"qui latrant non loquuntur"—ready to beset the parturient while he is yet in the straw, and either detract from the merit of his offspring, or (if that be indubitable) deny that he was ever brought to bed of it.

It has ever been so. All great discoverers have been aspersed and belied, either with

regard to the utility of their projects (as was the case with the patentee of the Peg Boots) or with regard to their originality—as happened to Fulton with his Steam Boats. Will you therefore say that nature is unjust? Oh! short-sighted philosopher! mark the conclusion! Know, that there is another “bonne loi naturelle”—which dooms these onsets of envy to be—like the chase of a cat after her tail—as futile as they are impetuous.

The whole course of History proves the existence of these natural “*Leges non scriptæ*.” Indeed the former has always been known and admitted; so notoriously known and admitted, that the citation of any authorities in proof of it, may appear perhaps a useless parade—I will however mention the opinion of one great author of antiquity, because I know the especial reverence which you profess for him, and your willingness to adopt even his *dicta*; I allude to Tacitus. He says expressly that it is “*Insitum mortalibus à natura recentem*” “*aliorum felicitatem ægris oculis intueri.*” Hist. Lib. 2.

You will say that there is no doubt of this, and that there is as little doubt that every other sin is equally caused by a natural propensity, I grant you. But observe a distinction. All the other vices have some excuse for their commencement, or some enjoyment annexed to their successful prosecution. The angry man has been injured or insulted: the miser

looks forward to that contemplation of his "nummos in arcâ"*—which can compensate him for obloquy, and the hisses of the populace: envy alone has neither cause for its beginning, not delight in its completion. Again; the other passions have some certain termination,—*"sunt denique fines:"* The glutton may for a time, quench his flame in a bowl of turtle soup, or extinguish it with an oyster paté, but envy is insatiable and interminable.

It is also invariably unsuccessful. The records of all nations prove it. Need I trouble you by adducing examples, with which you are perfectly familiar? Saul envied David; was David the worse for it? Joseph's brethren envied him; what did it end in? Certainly not in the abasement of Joseph. And would nature, think you, without some object of eminent importance, thus force men, as it were, to be subject to this worst of all passions: which has been called by a very wise man, "the rotting of the bones,"† and of which a great poet has declared, that its torments are equal in severity to those inflicted by the worst tyrants?‡ Certainly not. And what is that object? The instances I have just adduc-

* "Populus nec sibilat; at mihi plando

"Ipse domi, simul ac nummos contemplar in arcâ."

Hor. Sat. L. 1. 1. 66.

† Prov. 14, 13.

‡ "Invidia Sæculi non invenire tyranni

"Majus tormentum." Hor. Ep. L. 1. 2. 58.

ed prove it to be the advancement of the envied person. Saul's envy towards David only accelerated the exaltation of the Shepherd; and the envy of his brethren, was the direct cause of the glory of Joseph.

Envy then, can be nothing but the means employed by nature, to effect indirectly, what she is precluded (by her compact, to make all men equal at first) from effecting directly;—to wit, the superiority of one man over another.

You will observe, that throughout this argument, I have taken for granted the compact of nature for the relative equality of mankind. I have done so, because I consider it a matter, no longer in dispute. Prior modern philosophers have asserted it as positively, and have demonstrated it as satisfactorily to my judgment, as if they had peeped into the celestial Archives, and there found and copied a recorded contract to that effect, duly entered into *coram* the proper officer.

By these arguments I have been fully persuaded of the correctness of my new theory; and I trust, my friend, that they will avail for your conversion. So strong is my conviction, that I have come to an invincible resolution, to pay no attention or regard to any production or invention whatsoever, patented or not, unless the hue and cry be sufficient to assure me of the thing's having pretensions to at least moderate excellence.

I doubt not but the success of this experiment will confirm your belief in my doctrines.

I shall inform you of the event, the moment it takes place.

Yours, &c.